

*Wringing Blood from a Stone* was an installation of sculptural and new media work by Lucy Weaver shown at [Solar Noon](#) from Sept. - Oct. 2025. Solar Noon is an artist-run project space in Cincinnati, Ohio and organized by [Caroline Anderson](#).

The following is a conversation between Lewis Thelen and Lucy Weaver in response to the exhibition.

[Lucy](#) is an artist and educator based in Ohio. Her work explores the interwoven narrative of faith, technology, and embodied perception.

Lewis is a researcher also based in Ohio. His interests include artificial life, complexity science and the poetics of the contemporary.

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Lewis: Going into the show I obviously had some familiarity with your work and the conceptual milieu informing it, so to start I'm most curious about those who came in with little to no context. What were they picking up on? What did they want to talk to you about? What was resonating with them?

Lucy: The core theme of sensing, both by humans and machines came up a lot. The centerpiece of the show, *Doubt*, demanded a lot of attention.

There is an interactive aspect of that piece, where the viewer is encouraged to touch a fully functional iPhone embedded in the semi-realistic torso. This touch interaction triggers an automation that photographs the viewer, super-imposes text on it, and allows the viewer to send (text, email, airdrop, etc.) the pic where they wish. I found when telling people that they could touch the sculpture that a lot of them shied away from touching the phone. Instead, they would touch the disembodied, latex-skinned torso. Verbatim, someone told me it was "too intimate" to touch someone else's phone but had no issues touching the torso's pseudo-flesh abdomen.

Given our familiarity with each other's work and references, I'm wondering if the work evoked anything you were surprised by?

Lewis: *Doubt* was definitely the piece I was drawn to the most. I knew in advance that upon pressing one of the phone icons it was going to try and take a picture of me. I jumped out of frame to try and evade it, but the lag between my input to the device and it performing its operation made me second guess the functionality. I looked back at it only for my image to be in that moment captured. It was the jerkiness of the interface, the hitch between input and output,

the bucking of my command that made it feel like the device did have a sort of agency. It made me think about the sensuousness of designed interfaces, the way they give way to us. A good interface feels non-existent but pleasurable. This goes beyond just interfaces, you can see the sycophancy of more consumer facing LLMs, recommendation feeds conforming to and then shaping us.

I like thinking about the obscured agency of our digital environment and contrasting it with that fascinating account of Renaissance practices surrounding touch and religious artifacts you give in the essays accompanying the show. Especially how peasants would throw objects just to make contact with a statue of a religious figure being paraded through the streets. This active recognition of the divine and the intentional pursuit of the individual to physically interact with it compared to our daily, largely passive interaction with the analogous contemporary divinity of cyberspace.

What do you make of this? This quasi-cybernetic-divinity and our own passive lived relationship to it?

Lucy: As the built environment expands to include all sorts of digital worlds and methods of knowledge-making, I think the question of human agency becomes really essential. Where touch becomes important is as a sense that can make us aware of the boundaries of that agency. For most of human history it's through touch that our intentions become manifest to the world outside. Conflict between your intentions and your environment is necessary, the friction is what builds meaning. If the almost non-existence of scrolling is sensual, then the friction-based feedback of touch is outright carnal.

This sort of understanding is hard to come by in contemporary digital interfacing. Instead, they cave to our intentions immediately. Corporeal reality falls away entirely. Rather than the rough feedback of friction, our digital reality is defined through belief.

As an example, it's obvious that Instagram no longer fosters genuine social connection, but as a culture we have an immense faith in it doing so. There are entire platforms that function as vaporware, insofar that they do not give the results that we believe they are capable of. We seem to have forgotten that we are forgoing our agency in exchange for this faith in the data. It's a deeply passive relationship, with a strong connection to late-stage capitalism and contemporary governance. I like that term Cybernetic-divinity to capture both how large and alien the system is to human sensing.

Lewis: Yes, exactly! I really want to follow up for a second with the importance of touch. Touch as the experience of these points of friction, is the means by which we delineate the borders of

ourselves as a lived subject. I think Merleau-Ponty's example of the blind man and his cane is illustrative here. In that the tip of the cane is the point at which the man's sensory experience makes contact with the world, the point where he feels ripples and eddies in his sensory stream, the tip of the cane is the border of the man. The border is the point at which the world responds back. In a sense, our subjectivity is defined in terms of opposition.

But the digital stream doesn't behave like this. A content feed never ends, it never bottoms out into a point of contact. Even beyond the surface level ways in which the content itself alters us (shaping our interests, politics, fetishes etc), the very dynamics of the feeds creates a new regime of subject-environment interaction far afield from the sort of oppositional call and response of the material world. Our thinking is made to inherit the rhythms of these content flows. And of course these dynamics are shaped by the statistics of data, the physics of hyper-dimensional spaces, inconceivably alien to our own potential experience limited as it is by embodiment. I think this really demands a genuine engagement with machinic phenomenology and perhaps invites allusions to the divine if only in that phenomenology's incomprehensibility.

Lucy: I'm a big fan of Merleau-Ponty, specifically around the questions of agency raised by embodiment. It reveals a new depth to the disembodiment in our experiences with technology and data.

This is where I start to turn to much older conceptions of belief and reality-making. History is littered with these faith-based rejections of the material, instead favoring transcendent knowledge gained through some form of technical phenomenology. Maybe the earliest in the western esoteric canon is the early Christian Gnostic sects. I have strong interest in the esoteric systems of John Dee, who combined occult practices with cartography and astronomy to guide the Elizabethan court into becoming the colonial empire of England. Both of these references are largely dependent on technology shifting the dynamics of our structures of thought. They both share a strong desire to escape the limitations of embodiment through knowledge acting as a faith.

It's obvious how we've inherited this faith-based engagement with technology today. Again returning to the example of an Instagram post, imagine you are promoting some undertaking that you want others to see. The platform dynamics of today really convince you that social media is the best location for this, as we have accepted clicks as 1-to-1 representation of support, interest, etc. You have faith in the platform to bring you this engagement, and faith in the "like" as legitimate, despite how much your embodied experience contradicts this. The real feedback of this technology is completely alien to our sense of touch and material reality. Without belief in its outputs, all you are left with is the screen. In the cybernetic turn, both touch and the material

become simple inputs/outputs rather than the vector to measure our agency and knowledge against.

Lewis: While I agree faith definitely does play a role in people's engagement with social media platforms and digital agency more broadly, I would push back on the degree of contradiction between platform actions and real material action. Faith does not spring up out of nowhere and similar to the christian canon I think we can point to a number of 'miracles' that lend grounding to the convictions of social media users. Take early Web 2.0 cases like r/atheism collectively donating water tanks to villages in Sub-Saharan Africa or the Arab Spring as it is presented in the mainstream. Material action channeled through or enabled by digital action.

Then there are more contemporary examples such as Mr. Beast lavishing fans selected to appear in his videos with piles of cash or the Hawk Tuah girl first becoming an overnight celebrity and then leveraging that status into monetary gain. Not only do these later cases point to the growing enmeshment of digital culture and financial capital, but particularly with the Hawk Tuah girl it points to a shift in source of the miracle itself. She is a case of effectively random virality, the 'algorithm' gracing her with divine favor, raising her up from amongst the masses. It's the shift from devotees channeling divine power to the divine spirit itself acting of its own volition. In either case, I think, solid standing for faith (misguided or not) in the ability of one's digital presence to impart real-world, material change.

Lucy: I think our information-based approach to reality gives faith and miracles a deeper meaning. Jacques Vallee (who I think is both a genius and a limited-hangout boogeyman) put this really well with the example of synchronicity. He says, "*If we live in the associate universe of the software scientist rather than the Cartesian sequential universe of the space-time physicist, then miracles are no longer irrational events... we may be traversing incidents by association*". This works both for Google's SEO and historical religious experiences.

Lewis: Yes exactly, synchronicity is hard to ignore and a really productive lens for approaching this massively interconnected contemporary we inhabit. I remember sitting in a shared coworking space in my office looking at the furnishings and thinking that everything from the chairs to the fixtures had all been optimized. There was intent and strategy behind every fold and curve. While maybe not true, maybe not even remotely, it is this sense of an all present algorithm that leads to the perceived eradication of chance. And I think it is in this paranoia that I see the most striking glimpses of contemporary divinity.

Lucy: Right, Vallee really nails this relationship between the phenomenological experience of synchronicity and our society being increasingly organized by information. He says "*If you believe that the universe is a universe of 'information', then you should expect coincidences.*"

The "sameness" of optimized office furniture is a great example because of just how materially grounded it is. It reveals the ways in which information as the basis for reality (in supply chains, production, advertisement, etc.), has superseded any other rationale even at the material level.

Lewis: A global interconnected symbolic network, operating with agency over the material realm. I think this is where themes of your work begin to make contact with a much broader phenomenon than just digital interfaces and social media. Look at the ways in which indices of financial capital become untethered from material infrastructure and at the same time now drive the direction of it. Eddies and whirls within this stream of symbols raising up physical structures while crushing others (the 2008 mortgage crisis or the current AI bubble and data infrastructure buildup are prime examples). It's all couched in this move away from materiality and into a realm of pure value, a trend I think we can see all around us.

Lucy: As you noted, this information-reality is best conceptualized as a sort of fluid dynamics, with eddies, flows, and whirls that intersect and command our previously materially defined infrastructures. While UI/UX & social media are common and relatable ways to see this, it really operates on the level of capital. It's worth noting that Marx, when he defined the flow of capital as M-C-M' (money into commodity into more money), noted that the true capitalist aspires for a flow of M-M' (money that begets money). The goal is symbols that produce symbols, with little regard for the meatspace substrate it carves through.

Lewis: I'm glad you bring up Marx's model of commodity exchange, I think it and in particular the transfiguration between the material and immaterial at play in it is another point of contact between your work and the broader contemporary milieu. The digital operates upon the material only because it is pegged to certain points of correspondence. We have digital representations, statistical models in vector space, generated at points of our corporeal contact with digital spaces. Touch as, you play heavily on, is a great example. Our finger movements across a screen is a point of contact, that contact and measurement is the point at which we become transfigured into the digital realm. We are modeled by it and it in turn envelops us.

I know your work very explicitly deals with ideas of surveillance, but how do you approach the idea of digital representation/transfiguration, particularly as it spills out onto representations well-beyond just bytes (ie the interconnections of capital)?

Lucy: Transfiguration is an important concept, and I think points to the grand scale of a cybernetic divinity. Even in a secular "invisible hand" sort of way, it is a Providence beyond human experience. I don't think representation is diametrically opposed to transfiguration, instead it sets up the potential for transfiguration to occur. In occult ritual there is the concept of

"invoking" and "evoking", always in that order. First, you must invoke (represent) the entity, desire, etc., and only then can evoke or transfigure it into reality.

This raises the question in regard to surveillance, what are we evoking? The capturing of our likeness, even without our consent, seems like a lesser issue. It's the existential question of how reality is reshaped when all the data is named and reduced to its representation. We see this on the level of capital all the time, when entire populations are deemed statistically insignificant as consumers, and are thus degraded to below the signifiers of "human" for the sake of lean efficiency. It's the evoking of this post-optical, data-centric system that erodes basic human dignity and morality that concerns me the most.

I want to be clear that I don't think it is quite as simple as "UI/UX is evil, Data is bad". Sensing and model-making are essential to a rationalist vision of a humanist future, and we can't throw that out completely. I'm hesitantly optimistic, but I think acknowledging how bound up these technologies are with faith is a good first step towards building more equitable and materially sensible visions of technological development. I'm on the constant lookout for ways in which our techno-reality can be positive for the human subject. It demands a heretical view of this cybernetic divinity, as something that can be evaded, delegitimized, and recaptured for positive ends. However, it is clear to me that this cannot be done via purely reactionary tactics and strategy. The neo-luddites will not save us. What is really demanded of us are competitive alternatives. We have to build better gods.